

Abatt.

*Tabled by
Hon. L. Hiscott MLC
17/3/20*

PARLIAMENTARY LIBERAL PARTY PAPER

Response to Petition PET19/4/LC



PURPOSE:

- An e-petition presented by Member for Elwick the Hon Josh Willie MLC, carrying the signatures of 22 citizens of Tasmania and a paper petition from 362 citizens of Tasmania who draw to the attention of the House the increasing concern in the community about the crisis in Tasmania's child safety system.
- The petitioners:
 - (a) note the increasing concern in the community about the crisis in Tasmania's child safety system.
 - (b) note that frontline workers are trying their best to protect children but are limited due to the growing number of cases and lack of resourcing; and
 - (c) note that the Government is failing to protect Tasmania's children.
- Your petitioners, therefore, request the House to:
 - (a) acknowledge that children and families are in desperate crisis situations;
 - (b) note that the effects of child abuse and neglect are significant, leading to life-long consequences; and
 - (c) call on the Minister to take responsibility, address the failings of the system and provide a statement to petitioners outlining actions.
- The purpose of this paper is to outline the Government's response to the Petition.

RESPONSE:

- Whilst the Government acknowledges the concerns raised in this petition, there is no evidence of a crisis in Tasmania's Child Safety System.
- The Tasmanian Government does note that the effects of child abuse and neglect are significant, which is why there is now a major focus on early intervention, to reduce the number of children and young people needing to enter care.
- That is why any allegations that Tasmania's children at risk are "waiting" for a response from child safety services are false and a fundamental misrepresentation of how the Child Safety Service now operates as part of this redesign of the system.

- When we came to Government we committed to a comprehensive reform and redesign of services to children, young people and their families through *Strong Families, Safe Kids*.
- This year's State Budget supports the continuation of Strong Families, Safe Kids with an additional \$2.3 million into strengthening quality assurance processes, improved practice in investigation and response, delivery of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Outcomes Framework and ongoing change management activity to embed the principles of the redesign within the operation of the Child Safety Service.
- The budget also allocates \$2.27 million to cover the ongoing resourcing of the Strong Families, Safe Kids Project Team as well as the continuation of the Serious Events Review Committee and implementation of quality assurance, corrective actions and continuous improvement strategies originating from that Committee and other external sources.
- This is on top of the \$24 million dollars over the next four years from the previous Budget which included the employment of 25 additional Child Safety Officers and other front line staff, and the \$51.2 million that we committed in our first term of Government, as well as our \$16.7 million election commitments.
- This investment is not just concentrating on staffing numbers, but is helping to shape the way we approach the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, by helping their families and carers, which will see long term benefits for children and young people.
- Our redesign ensures children, young people and their families are linked with the right help at the earliest opportunity, delivering intensive support to families to avoid the need to remove the child or young person from the home, and provides more support for child safety officers so that we get the best outcomes for children and families.
- Providing more intensive, early support to families who are at risk through our significant investment in the redesign, helps us as a Government better support families before they get into crisis.
- The *Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line*, which became operational late last year, provides a 'single front door' service which connects callers with the help they need through a range of Government and non-government services and programs.
- The *Advice and Referral Line* brings together the family support focussed Gateway Service and the child at risk focussed Child Safety Service to collectively better understand the full needs of children and their families. This means quicker and more seamless referral of calls between the two services.
- This Service is already seeing a reduction in overall notifications, because by giving families and carers the support they need earlier, children are less likely to be removed from their families.

- This change in approach and recording also means those who need help most urgently, get the help they need, with Priority one - the most serious of cases - requiring the child to be seen by Child Safety Services on the same day.
- The move to focus on early intervention has also meant a change in language, moving away from creating a culture of blaming, to more neutral and constructive ways of talking about safety and wellbeing, because we knew we needed to change the way we responded to children at risk.
- Through the Strong Families, Safe Kids Reform, the Child Safety Service is investing more time and effort in supporting and working with families to build their capability with the aim of reducing the number of children in care significantly.
- At the heart of the redesign is a more collaborative way of working – a shared responsibility for the welfare of every child, and the Tasmanian Government will continue to make every effort to preserve and restore families, where it is safe to do so, because we all want children to be safe and we all have a part to play.

APPROVED



Hon Roger Jaensch MP
Minister for Human Services

Date: 17/1/2020